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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses instructional objectives in middle school social studies programs in Virginia. Undertaken in response to a concern that middle school objectives were largely unsettled despite a significant amount of research, this study aimed at clarifying objectives by investigating Virginia social studies educators' professional positions toward educational objectives. Educators surveyed included superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of instruction, social studies supervisors, principals, teachers, curriculum specialists, and administrative assistants. A content analysis was performed on the question of what instructional objectives should be achieved by students in the social studies program. Findings indicated that for grades four through eight, the two most important objectives were geography skills (map skills, naming and/or locating regions) and understanding and/or appreciating other cultures. For grades seven and eight, educators indicated that the most important objectives were understanding the role and/or values of good citizenship and appreciating the heritage and history of the United States. The conclusions are that objectives in the lower middle school grades are more cognitive than affective and that social studies programs in the upper middle school grades reflect more diversity of content, place more emphasis on skill development, and emphasize citizenship education goals. A copy of the questionnaire and responses in tabular form are included in the document. (DB)

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Middle School Social Studies Objectives In the Old Dominion

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Introduction

In recent years educational objectives in middle school social studies have occupied the attention of educational specialists, of representatives of various areas of study, and laymen. These objectives however, have not been easy to define. "Many of them do not provide clear cut guidelines for curriuclum development and evaluation because of their general ambiguity." (Orlandi, 1971). Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) indicate objectives in social studies have been defined in many ways during the last 100 years: the study of history; reflective inquiry; simplified social sciences; integrative social sciences; core of processes including inquiry skills, decision making, values analysis; values and moral development. The National Council for the Social Studies (1971) recognized the confusion, conflict, and competing claims that have plagued the profession. A Task Force of NCSS responsible for curriculum guidelines recommended that the teaching of social studies require self-interrogation, structured dialogue, and strategies to

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identify principles which represent social studies education. Despite these recommendations, universal acceptance of them was not forthcoming as they were revised in 1979. (NCSS, 1979)

Feeling that this concern with objectives in middle social studies was still largely unsettled, the author undertook this study in Virginia. The purpose of the study was twofold: first, to investigate Virginia educators' professional positions toward educational objectives in middle school social studies, grades 4-8; and second, to quantify middle school instructional objectives in Virginia.

Sample

A questionnaire pertaining to educational objectives in the middle school social studies, grades 4-8, was sent to every school district in Virginia (141). Of the school districts forwarded a questionnaire, 120 completed and returned questionnaires. Five additional surveys were excluded from the final analysis because necessary identification was not reported. Table 1 shows the distribution of the final sample size.

Table 1

Distribution of Sample (T=115)	
Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents	32
Directors of Instruction	32
Social Studies Supervisors	25
Principals	11
Teachers	7
Curriculum Specialists	5
Administrative Assistants	3

Analysis

A content analysis was performed on the question - What instructional objectives should be achieved by students in the social studies program 4-8? The purpose of the content analysis was to break down the hundreds of idiosyncratic responses into some smaller, manageable number of meaningful categories. The responses for grades 4 through 8 were broken down into 42 categories (see Table 2), while as specific as possible, are

Table 2

GRADES 4-8

CODE DEFINITIONS

1 - learn about local and/or Virginia history

1b - learn about local and/or Virginia colonial history

2 - U.S. history growth and development, heritage, etc.

2b - U.S. colonial history

3 - World History

3b - the role of the U.S. in relation to the rest of the world

4 - U.S. and/or Virginia government, the democratic process, etc.

5 - understand the role of a citizen, values, etc. of good citizenship

6 - understand and/or appreciate other cultures

7 - current events or current social issues and/or problems

8 - Virginia or local geography

9 - United States Geography

10 - World Geography

11 - maps skills, or rudiamentary geography skills (i.e. name and/or locate states, countries, continents, etc.)

12 - geography (general)

13 - how geography relates to local or Virginia history

14 - how geography relates to U.S. history

15 - how geography relates to people and/or cultures in general

16 - how the past relates to present and/or future

17 - interdependence of all people

18 - work and/or study habits, skills, etc.

19 - inquiry and research skills, thinking, curiosity, etc.

20 - appreciation of work ethic, etc.: "identify the role of economics in everyday life."

21 - understand one's own feelings and/or those of others

22 - develop an awareness and/or appreciation of our natural resources and/or the necessity of conservation, the role of our environment, etc.

23 - understanding the free-enterprise system

30 - understanding of U.S. and Virginia history and geography

31 - understanding of Virginia history and geography

32 - understanding of U.S. history and geography

33 - understanding of world history and geography

35 - understanding of the governments of other countries

45 - Virginia history, government, and geography

40 - Virginia, U.S. and world history

46 - U.S. history, government, and geography

51 - Virginia and U.S. history

52 - U.S. and world history

61 - U.S. history, government, and economics (also geography in a few cases)

62 - U.S. and Virginia

63 - Virginia

64 - world history, government and economics (and in some cases, geography) or history, government, and economics, and perhaps geography, in general.

88 - other objectives

99 - no response

not without variations and therefore should be noted when reading and/or interpreting the "results" of this study. In addition, it should be noted that the results for the middle school grades are, for the most part, reported without reference to the ranking of the objectives. In other words, instead of reporting the categories (objectives) most frequently ranked first in importance and then the "objectives" most frequently ranked second and so forth, the results have been reported without regard to rank. For example, if a particular "objective" was ranked first in importance by 10% of the respondents, ranked second by 8% and then ranked third in importance by 5% of the sample, then it would be noted that 23% of the sample mentioned that particular "objective."

Results

4-6 Objectives

Twenty-six percent of the respondents indicated that the "most important" objective for grades 4-6 (ranked either basic geography skills (i.e. map skills, naming and/or locating states, countries, and/or continents, etc.). Twenty-five percent of the sample indicated that understanding and/or appreciating other cultures was the most important instructional objective for grades 4-6. The next most important objectives were: understanding and/or appreciating the heritage or history of the United States (21%), understanding and/or appreciating the United States and/or Virginia systems of government (18%),

understanding and appreciating the role and values of good citizenship (16%), local and/or Virginia History (16%), developing good inquiry, research, and/or thinking skills (16%), and understanding how geography relates to (i.e. effects) the lives of people and cultures (15%). In Table 3, the responses by first, second, and third choices are shown.

Table 3

GRADE 4-6 OBJECTIVES

	1st	2nd	3rd	T
1	9	6	1	16
1b	1	0	0	1
2	6	12	3	21
2b	2	1	1	4
3	0	3	5	8
3b	0	0	2	2
4	5	9	4	18
4b	0	0	0	
5	7	4	5	16
6	8	8	9	25
7	0	2	3	5
8	2	1	0	3
9	0	1	1	2
10	1	1	2	4
11	10	11	5	26
12	2	2	0	4
13	2	0	0	2
14	0	1	0	1
15	5	4	6	15
16	0	1	0	1
17	2	1	4	7
18	1	1	2	4
19	5	4	7	16
20	1	1	1	3
21	6	4	1	11
22	3	3	5	11
23	0	1	1	2
30	1	0	0	1
31	6	0	1	7
32	1	4	1	6
33	0	0	3	3
35	0	0	2	2
40	0	1	0	1
45	1	1	0	2
46	0	1	0	1
51	2	0	1	3
52	0	0	1	1
61	1	2	1	4
62	0	1	0	1
63	3	0	0	3
64	1	1	1	1
88	3	1	5	9
99	17	21	29	*

Results

7-8 Objectives

Eight percent of the respondents indicated that understanding the role and/or values of good citizenship was the most important objective for grades 7-8, while another 24% ranked this objective either second or third in importance. Sixteen percent of the sample indicated that helping the student understand and/or appreciate the heritage or history of the United States was the most important instructional objective while another 13% ranked this objective either second or third in importance (total - 29%). Twenty-nine percent of the people sampled also indicated that helping the student understand the U.S. and/or Virginia system of government was the most important objective (ranked first (11%) second (11%), or third (7%). The next most frequently mentioned objectives were helping the student: develop good inquiry, research, and/or thinking skills (18%), understand and/or appreciate his own needs and feelings and/or those of others (16%), learn basic geography skills - i.e. map skills, naming and/or locating states, countries, continents, etc. (14%), understand local and/or Virginia history (13%), and become aware of and/or understand current social problems, issues, and/or events (11%). In Table 4, the responses by first, second, and third choice are shown.

Table 4

GRADES 7-8 OBJECTIVES

	1st	2nd	3rd	Total
1	7	5	1	13
1b	0	0	2	2
2	16	6	7	29
2b	0	0	1	2
3	1	4	2	7
3b	1	0	1	2
4	11	11	7	29
4b	2	2	0	4
5	8	14	10	32
6	1	4	4	9
7	3	4	4	11
8	0	3	0	3
9	0	0	0	0
10	0	0	4	4
11	7	5	2	14
12	2	0	0	2
13	0	0	0	0
14	0	1	0	1
15	3	0	4	7
16	2	5	3	10
17	1	3	2	6
18	4	1	2	7
19	8	4	6	18
20	1	1	1	3
21	8	4	4	16
22	0	5	2	7
23	1	1	0	2
30	1	0	0	1
31	2	0	0	2
32	0	0	0	0
33	0	0	0	0
35	0	1	1	2
40	1	0	0	1
45	0	0	1	1
46	1	0	0	1
51	0	1	0	1
52	0	0	0	0
61	0	2	0	2
62	0	0	0	0
63	1	0	0	1
64	2	0	1	3
88	1	3	6	10
99	14	23	37	*

Implications

This study suggested the following conclusions.

...The 4-6 social studies program:

- focuses more heavily on knowledge objectives than on affective goals (attitudes, feelings, values, and socialization).
- tends to stress the goal of teaching knowledge objectives which rely on U.S. history, Virginia Studies, physical and cultural geography, and world cultures.
- taught as a separate subject area.

...The 7-8 social studies program:

- reflects more diversity of content goals than grades 4-6.
- places more attention on skills development than earlier grades (e.g. values education, critical thinking, map reading) while focusing on knowledge objectives.
- emphasizes "citizenship education" goals.

Conclusion

There are some questions that should be raised in light of these conclusions. One that seems to need some attention is the apparent notion that the realm of the affect is not vital to middle school students. Overall this is not surprising since this has been the state of social studies for nearly half a century. It is distressing however to see the apparent lack of effect that the New Social Studies has had on social studies in the middle schools. In addition the middle school continues to allow high schools to dictate their curriculum either directly or indirectly. This lack of change and seeming unconcern with the broader perspectives of social studies can only be detrimental to the development of global citizens in the coming generation of decision makers.

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